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Dedication

A dedication to Chandan Mahanta (1962–2023): A rare gem and pioneer in environmental hydrology

Photo Credit: IIT Guwahati

The *Journal of Environmental Science, Health & Sustainability* is dedicating this issue (Vol. 2 & No. 1) to the life and legacy of Prof. (Dr.) Chandan Mahanta. Dr. Mahanta was an erudite scholar, an educator, an administrator, and above all, a name deeply etched in the history of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati, India. A staunch environmentalist, he had left an indelible mark on the academic and scientific community.

Dr. Mahanta started his academic career as a lecturer in 1997 and earned a Ph.D in Environmental Hydrology from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India, in 1995. His research took him to prestigious institutions worldwide. He has also served as an ASCE-EWRI visiting fellow at the Utah Water Research Laboratory of Utah State University, USA, and has been a visiting fellow under the FP7-EURINDIA project at KTH Royal Institute of Technology and University of Applied Sciences, Karlsruhe, Germany. He was affiliated with the Monash Sustainability Institute at Monash University under the Australian Leadership Fellowship Program. He served as Dean of Students' Affairs, and Professor and Head in the Civil Engineering Department, and the Centre for the Environment at IIT Guwahati.

Dr. Mahanta had a profound impact on the foundation of IIT Guwahati. He was among the institution's earliest members, playing a pivotal role during its formative years. His commitment to advancing knowledge in river science and water sustainability has led to the successful execution of numerous nationally funded projects supported by the Government of India (MHRD, MoUD, MoEF, and DST), as well as internationally funded initiatives with agencies including Sida, FP7-EURINDIA, UNICEF, and IUCN. Dr. Mahanta has also served on several national and international committees, including the Planning Commission of India.

In the state of Assam, India, Dr. Mahanta served as an active member in the State Water Quality Task Force, Advisory Committee of Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), Technical Advisory Committee of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission, Technical Advisory Group-Public Health Engineering Department, Water Mission, State Water Policy Drafting Committee, and Eco-sensitive Zone Evaluation Committee. Dr. Mahanta also served as a member of the Technical Expert Committee to study the downstream impacts of the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project, a 2,000 MW dam on the Subansiri River on the Assam–Arunachal Pradesh border, India. Dr. Mahanta was also involved in establishing an informative system on the water resources of the Brahmaputra River System and a project on Digital Brahmaputra, which leveraged IT applications to build a robust hydrological information system.

Dr. Mahanta and his research team studied the groundwater arsenic contamination issue in the

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Brahmaputra Floodplains in Assam, India. He was the pioneer in leading a comprehensive arsenic monitoring and surveillance program that led to the testing of over 50,000 public wells across Assam, a collaborative project with the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), Govt. of Assam, and UNICEF. His research played a crucial role in documenting the magnitude of arsenic contamination in the Brahmaputra Floodplains in Assam.

Dr. Mahanta's work has had a lasting impact on the Northeast Indian hydrology, a region marked by its unique and complex water systems. He authored 1 book, 25 book chapters and co-authored over 100 peer reviewed journal articles and proceedings. Dr. Mahanta visited many countries, including USA, Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, China, Taiwan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka for academic assignments. His efforts earned him both national and international recognition. His contributions serve as a reminder of the importance of the relentless pursuit of knowledge and the transformative power of education.

Dr. Mahanta mentored several undergraduate and graduate students and encouraged them to apply their scientific knowledge to solve real world challenges related to water resources and environmental sustainability. Such was his mentorship and guidance that all his students eventually went on to build illustrious careers and brought laurels in their respective fields.

Beyond his scholarly and institutional contributions, Dr. Mahanta was a person of rare warmth, creativity, and human connection. A gifted photographer (example photograph in the supplement; journal cover photograph) with a deep love for nature, his work continues to live on across the IIT Guwahati campus through institute calendars, wall hangings, and photographs displayed in different spaces, quietly bearing testimony to his sensitive eye and enduring bond with the landscape around him. Dr. Mahanta had an exceptional ability to connect with people across generations and roles; he was approachable, engaging, and deeply empathetic. An excellent orator, he could hold an audience effortlessly – whether in a classroom, a formal gathering, or an informal conversation keeping people engrossed with his clarity of thought, humor, and sincerity. His personality radiated positivity, curiosity, and generosity of spirit, making him not only a respected academic but also a cherished colleague, mentor, and friend. Those who knew him remember not just what he did, but how he made people feel – heard, inspired, and valued. His vision, domain knowledge and contributions will be forever remembered by all.

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